

4. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

In 1999, public health researcher Albert Donnay argued that Poe's death was a result of carbon monoxide poisoning from coal gas that was used for indoor lighting during the 19th century. Donnay took clippings of Poe's hair and tested them for certain heavy metals that would be able to reveal the presence of coal gas. The test was inconclusive, leading biographers and historians to largely discredit Donnay's theory.

5. Heavy Metal Poisoning

While Donnay's test didn't reveal levels of heavy metal consistent with carbon monoxide poisoning, the tests did reveal elevated levels of mercury in Poe's system months before his death. According to Semtner, Poe's mercury levels were most likely elevated as a result of a cholera epidemic he'd been exposed to in July of 1849, while in Philadelphia. Poe's doctor prescribed calomel, or mercury chloride. Mercury poisoning, Semtner says, could help explain some of Poe's hallucinations and delirium before his death. However, the levels of mercury found in Poe's hair, even at their highest, are still 30 times below the level consistent with mercury poisoning.